

## PTC Finds Increase in Harsh Profanity on TV

### Analysis Shows Increasing Permissiveness of Broadcast Networks in Airing F-word and S-word During Primetime

LOS ANGELES (October 29, 2008) – The Parents Television Council™ found that profanity during primetime broadcast television not only has increased since 1998, but that harsher profanity has quickly risen in prominence and pervasiveness. More than a quarter of the expletives a child will hear on TV today will be the exact words or some form of the "f-word," the "s-word," or the "b-word" that air unbleeped or partially-bleeped on broadcast television.

In 1972, the late George Carlin infamously asserted in a comedy routine that there are “Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television,” yet when subsequently broadcast over the radio, it led to the Supreme Court case (FCC v. Pacifica) that affirmed the authority of the FCC to enforce the broadcast decency law. Today, six of those seven words have aired unedited on broadcast TV during primetime viewing hours. The remaining word aired unedited during a network news program, NBC’s Today, in February 2008. On November 4, the Supreme Court is set to hear arguments in the so-called “fleeting” profanity case (FCC v. Fox) concerning uses of the f-word and s-word on primetime broadcast television.

“Our research is shocking and especially troubling to parents. Not only are harsher profanities like the f-word and s-word airing during hours when children are likely to be in the viewing audience, but they are airing with greater frequency. There is certainly no ‘chilling’ effect on broadcast television as the networks like to claim. The opposite has occurred: broadcast standards have become so permissive that the term is now an oxymoron,” said PTC President Tim Winter.

“Our results show that when an expletive is introduced on television, usage of the word becomes commonplace in fairly short order. Then the broadcast networks feel the need to up the ante with even more offensive profanity. The result is that there is a significant increase in the overall use of profanity on the public airwaves, and an escalation in the offensiveness of the words used. While certain expletives may become ‘commonplace’ to network executives, they must keep in mind that

most parents do not want their children bombarded by those words during hours when they're most likely to be in the audience."

This Parents Television Council analysis of foul language on television is based on a comprehensive and exhaustive look at all primetime entertainment programming (sports and news programs excluded) on the major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC, CW, MyNetworkTV, UPN and WB) between 1998 and 2007. Every instance of unbleeped or partially-bleeped foul language selected for this analysis was recorded in and retrieved from the PTC's custom-designed Entertainment Tracking System (ETS) database and sorted by word, year, network and timeslot.

#### Major Findings:

1. Not only has the quantity of profanity increased dramatically on primetime broadcast television, but the trend is towards using even harsher words. Milder profanities like "hell" and "damn" would have been unthinkable to air on programs aimed at family audiences in the 1950s. Today, the types of profanities and the frequency of their usage have dramatically changed. If one harsh expletive is allowed to air during primetime, the likelihood increases that that word will air with more frequency within a network and across networks.

In total, nearly 11,000 expletives (hell, damn, ass, piss, screw, bitch, bastard, suck, crap, shit, and fuck) were aired during primetime on broadcast TV in 2007 – nearly twice as many as in 1998.

Milder expletives like hell, damn, crap, etc., are starting to take a back seat to harsher words. In 1998, 92% of the foul language on TV was comprised of milder expletives. In 2007, 74% of the foul language could be categorized as mild, however, more than a quarter of the expletives a child will hear on TV today will be some form of the f-word, s-word, or the b-word.

The f-word aired only one time on primetime broadcast TV in all of 1998 – yet it appeared 1,147 times on primetime broadcast TV in 2007 on 184 different programs.

The s-word, which appeared only two times in 1998, aired 364 times in 2007 on 133 different

programs.

Usage of the b-word on primetime television has increased 196% from 1998 to 2007 (431 to 1277). The number of programs using the b-word likewise increased from 103 in 1998 to 685 in 2007.

The f-word first aired on a UPN show in 1998 at 8:00 p.m. In 1999, the number of times the f-word aired on broadcast television during primetime increased to 11.

2. Harsh profanity is becoming more commonplace at earlier times of the day. Profanity is no longer confined to the latest hours of primetime where the viewing audience is primarily comprised of adults.

In 2007, 52% of the programs that contained the f-word and 55% of the programs that contained the s-word aired during the 8:00 p.m. Family Hour.

In 2007, the f-word aired in 96 shows during the 8:00 p.m. hour. CBS and Fox accounted for almost 60% of all shows airing this expletive.

In 1998, no shows on broadcast television aired the s-word at 8:00 p.m. or 9:00 p.m. By 2007, the s-word appeared in 73 shows at 8:00 p.m. and 52 shows at 9:00 p.m. Fox and ABC accounted for 77% of the shows airing the word during the 9:00 p.m. hour (46% and 31% respectively).

3. The V-chip ratings and content descriptors are wholly inadequate to protect children and families from this barrage of offensive language.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of the programs that aired the f-word and 25% of the programs that aired the s-word in 2007 did not carry the L-descriptor, which would have triggered the mechanism in the V-chip to allow families who do not wish to be exposed to such content to block the programs from coming into their homes.

In 2007, 29% of programs aired the b-word without an L-descriptor, which was more frequent than the f-word and s-word. This may indicate a growing comfort with the word in the networks' standards and

practices departments and their failure to even recognize the word as offensive.

“The networks must take seriously their responsibility to keep the publicly-owned airwaves safe for children and families, and time-of-day considerations are a critical component. This analysis refutes every excuse the networks assert to circumvent their responsibility. We hope that the Supreme Court and our public servants realize the frequency with which harsh profanities air on broadcast television and their pervasiveness on programs aimed at young children. It is simply unacceptable for the networks to barrage our children with this type of language,” Winter continued.

“Every instance of profanity is technically ‘fleeting.’ If the networks are ‘successful’ in claiming a legal ‘right’ to air expletives at any time of day, history proves that we can expect profanities to rise dramatically on broadcast television – even when millions of children are in the audience. If concerned parents and citizens do not speak out to their public servants about this immediately, we are certain to see even more harsh language appear during primetime broadcast hours in the months and years to come,” said Winter.

To speak with a representative from the Parents Television Council, please contact Kelly Oliver (ext. 140) or Megan Franko (ext. 148) at (703) 683-5004.

-----

The Parents Television Council™ ([www.parentstv.org](http://www.parentstv.org)®) is a non-partisan education organization advocating responsible entertainment. It was founded in 1995 to ensure that children are not constantly assaulted by sex, violence and profanity on television and in other media. This national grassroots organization has more than 1.3 million members across the United States, and works with television producers, broadcasters, networks and sponsors in an effort to stem the flow of harmful and negative messages targeted to children. The PTC also works with elected and appointed government officials to enforce broadcast decency standards. Most importantly, the PTC produces critical research and publications documenting the dramatic increase in sex, violence and profanity in entertainment. This information is provided free of charge so parents can make informed viewing choices for their own families.

© 1998-2009 Parents Television Council. All rights